

Being In Harmony

-The Way of Buddhist Religious Culture

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To be in harmony with the world around us, both with the human and the animal, is one of the principles advocated in Buddhism. This is in order that the human may, within his religious perimeter, attain his fullest development within himself and also secure for himself the maximum degree of success and happiness in life in the world outside. This latter, Buddhism insists, should be achieved without violence to anyone or anything. This should enable everyone, no matter of whatever religious creed, to foster peace on earth and goodwill among men.

With the Buddhists, expression of goodwill often takes the form 'May all beings enjoy maximum security of life and may they all be well and happy.' Its Pali refrain runs as ***Sukhino va khemino hontu sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta.*** Another popular wish is that no sentient being, while being happy himself or herself should show hostility or enmity to another: *satta sada hontu sukhi avera.* This, we would look upon as the highest expression of respect for all life, in every known form, anywhere and everywhere. It is also said about a truly good disciple of the Buddha that 'he is totally at home in any part of the world, east or west, north or south and that he never runs into conflict with any one'.

Catuddiso appatigho ca hoti.

Suttanipata. v. 47

In terms of today's very advanced scientific thinking like the **Biophilia**

Hypothesis which requires man to reckon with the entire ecosystem in whose midst he lives, teachings of Buddhism, of more than two and a half millennia ago, required man to adopt this wholesome attitude to the total environment in which he lives, including man and bird and beast.

This requires man to live within the framework of *dharma* or the good ethic of living, such living being called *dhamma-cariya* and *sama-cariya* [i.e. harmonious and balanced living]. Those who practice such a way are called *dhammatthā* or *dhamma*-dwellers. This principle primarily derives its authority from the recognition of the philosophy of mutual interdependence in the universe. Thus life on earth, taking into consideration even the wide concept of the universe, has to be a co-operative process, based on the principle of inter-relatedness, not only of mutual assistance but also of mutual non-interruption and non-interference, in order that serious imbalances and consequent destruction and disasters might not be brought about. This should virtually apply to all areas of religion, ethnicity and politics. The scientists of the world today emphatically announce the disastrous movement of man in the direction of destroying the biota of the world we live in [admittedly, though unwittingly at times]. Note:

“The one process now going on that will take millions of years to correct is the loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us.

Although oft cited and reported, the scale of the unfolding catastrophic loss of many and varied ecosystems through human activity is still only dimly perceived, for the link between the degradation of the biota and the diminishment of the human prospect is poorly understood.”

[The Biophilia Hypothesis Edited by Stephen R.Kellart and Edward O. Wilson, Island Press, 1993, p.4]

This philosophy of amity or friendship [i.e. *metta* = state of being a friend] which is fully enunciated in the Metta Sutta of the Buddhists [Sn. vv. 143-152 and

Kh. p. 8f.], brings within its fold all grades of life, man and bird and beast, no matter how large or small they are. Seen or unseen, near or far, all life is encompassed within thoughts of loving kindness. In displeasure or in ill-will, one shall not long for or pray for the destruction of another. With more or less maternal affection [*mata yatha niyam puttam*], one is called upon to look at life in the universe. This attitude is expected to pervade all areas of Buddhist life, both religious and secular.

To begin with, it is worth noting that in terms of life in society, the Buddhist ruler [*raja cakkavatti*] is called upon to provide peace and security, free from threats of assault or destruction, to men and animals in his kingdom. It is unquestionably his responsibility not only to provide for the security of his people but also assure safe living for the birds and beasts of the land [DN.III.60f. ; AN.I.109 f.]. Considerations both social and religious calls for such an attitude. It is the obligation of a righteous ruler which has been honoured and upheld as an ideal for over two thousand years in the history of our land. Out of such a philosophy which had the premier sanction of the state was born a deep-seated love for the environment, not only to include the birds and the beasts but also to tend the vegetation and foster growth of trees and plants.

People had already learnt to derive aesthetic delight and spiritual solace from them. It was present in the spirit of the religion and the first lessons in this wise were taught by the great stalwarts of the Sāsana like the Venerable Sariputta and Maha Kassapa. Their appraisal of the forest and all that is therein, including the birds and the beasts, must turn out to a recurrent theme on which our elders in the homes talk with fair frequency with their children and therefore come to be well known to and appreciated by our younger generation.

Let it ring through the ear of every good Buddhist as the Venerable Sariputta sings of the richness of the forest in this manner. We even conceive the possibility of these words being set to music in a manner that would certainly be spiritually edifying. Dwell upon the depth of the idea contained in this utterance. A

musically creative mind, enriched with a religious sanctity and sensitivity, could even create a whole symphony out of it.

*Ramaniyani arannani yattha na ramati jano
Vitaraga ramissanti na te kamagavesino.*

Thag. v. 992

Delightful are the forests, where no crowd [i.e. common worldlings]
Doth come to take its pleasure; there will they
Who are released from passions find their joy.
Not seekers they for sense - satiety.

Psalms of the Brethren v. 992

Here the Venerable Sariputta keenly observes at the same time that the untutored and therefore uncultured worldly beings are insensitive to these. The true Buddhist disciples are very much in this line of thinking for, like Thera Ekavihariya, they know that the Lord himself led the way in this direction. Ekavihāriya Thera says:

*Handa eko gamissami
arannam buddhavannitam.*

Thag. v. 537

Let me alone to the forest resort, the place
Much praised by the Buddha.

Thera Maha Kassapa finds the enchantment of the forest enhanced as the trumpeting of the wild elephants reverberates through the upland glades.

*Kunjarabhiruda ramma
te sela ramayanti mam*

Thag. v. 1062

As the impact of Buddhism came to be felt more and more on the life of Emperor Asoka of India, we see him increasingly practice this love towards animals. Not only the provision of sanctuaries for animals but even a reduction in the slaughter of animals for the royal kitchen is witnessed.

Not only peace and prosperity on earth but the very survival of man in the universe requires this new sanity of outlook in the social and religious philosophies of the world.